Compensating Disadvantageous Life Events

Social Origin Differences in the Effects of Family and Sibling Characteristics on Educational Outcomes

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Abstract

This thesis is a collection of four empirical studies which analyse the effects of family and sibling characteristics on educational outcomes. The analysis in all empirical studies is guided by the compensatory effect of social origin hypothesis according to which higher social origin families can reduce the negative impact of disadvantageous characteristics and life events on their children’s educational outcomes. In detail, I study the effects of month of birth, parental separation, birth order, birth spacing, and maternal age. I use data on England, Germany, and Sweden. On a methodological level, I employ natural experiments, fixed effects methods, and instrumental variable (IV) estimation in order to control for the influence of unobserved confounding variables. Overall, I find support for the initial hypothesis with respect to the effects of month of birth, parental separation, and close birth spacing. Contrary to that, I find no systematic social origin differences in the effects of birth order and maternal age on educational outcomes. In the conclusion, I discuss the implications of these findings for theories of the intergenerational transmission of education, the differences in life chances of children from socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged families, and the allocation of resources within families. I discuss how further research could possibly test in how far differences in parental involvement between social origin groups are underlying these relationships.
Jury: Fabrizio Bernardi (EUI, Supervisor), Jan O. Jonsson (Nuffield College), Hans-Peter Blossfeld (EUI), Dalton Conley (New York University) (via videolink)

Bio

In his research, Michael Grätz deals with child development and educational inequalities. He is particularly interested in identifying the factors which account for the intergenerational transmission of education.

Michael holds a BA in Sociology from the University of Heidelberg and a MSc in Sociology from St Antony’s College, University of Oxford. Currently he is a Postdoctoral Prize Research Fellow at Nuffield College, University of Oxford.